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15. A Visit to Kapála-Muchan.

By ANAND KOUL.

During my last inspection tour towards Śupayan, I paid a visit to Kapála-Muchan or Digom on 20th June, 1909. This is a place of Hindu pilgrimage situated in the south-western corner of the Valley about 24 miles from Srinagar. There are three springs here close to one another. At the main spring is an old liṅgam, rough and unhewn, and also some old sculptured stone images said to have been unearthed from the adjacent fields.

2. Recently the priests of this place, named Lakṣman Báyu and Viṣṇa Báyu, while digging near the point where the waters of the three springs meet, discovered a stone with a Sanskrit inscription in Śāradā character. As this is only a fragment, the exact meaning of the inscription cannot be made out.

प्रथम पंक्तिः

.....यश्चेत्सर्पतुस्त.....

२ पं

.....चाण्डव्ययश्चनः १ आदौ.....

३ पं

.....तियोभूद्वितीयास्यु.....

४ पं

.....सद्विवायत्त्याताहिया.....

५ पं

.....काग्निशिखाकलापनि, वह.....

६ पं

.....येनायकामे.....याश्च.....

७ पं

.....स्वचपंडितेषु १ शास्त्रान्नरः.....

It would seem that there was an ancient monument here into which this stone, giving an account of the builder, had been set up. There is at present no visible sign of any monument at this place, but if excavations are conducted some of its relics might be unearthed.

The priests have since succeeded in unearthing another fragment of the inscribed stone, and it is far more important than the one previously found, inasmuch as it gives the date of the monument in which the engraved stone had been erected.

This inscription, like that of the stone previously discovered, is in Sanskrit in the Sâradâ character and of the same style and purport. I give below a hand copy of it :—

यथा प्रमुंचे स[त्स]र्पस्तु कंचुक^[१] स[श]री

रतः तथा प्रमुंचेत् स्नातस्तु पा पं कं

चुकमत्रह्य [हि] १२ विक्रम सं—८४६

पंडित सोमजाति.....त्मज

.....कस्ययर्मसदनं ददानि

इत्येवं शिवम्

It says by way of the sanctity of the shrine that one is able to get rid of sins here as a snake is of its old skin, and concludes by stating that the monument, into which this inscribed stone had been built, had been given in charity to a Pandit of the Soma caste. The year visible in the inscription is the Vikramāditya era 846, but presumably it is 1846, as there seems to be a battered figure before 846. At present the Vikramāditya era being 1966, it is evident that the monument referred to in the inscription was built 120 years ago.

3. It may not be out of place to make here a brief mention of the legend relating to the place. The Māhātmya of this pilgrimage says that once Viṣṇu and Brahmā had a dispute as to which of them was superior to the other. At last it was agreed that they should go to Śiva and ask him to decide the point and that they would abide by his verdict. When they approached Śiva and told him what dispute they had, he created a liṅgam of bright light and said to them—"Viṣṇu, you go beneath, and Brahmā, you go above, this liṅgam and see where it terminates. Either of you who returns first after finding out the end of the liṅgam is greater than the other." They then set out, Viṣṇu downwards and Brahmā upwards, but though the one went deeper and deeper and other higher and higher they could not reach the end. They then returned to Śiva. Viṣṇu acknowledged his failure,

but Brahmā, who then had five heads, told Śiva falsely from his fifth mouth that he had seen the end of the liṅgām. Śiva knew that what he had said was untrue; so he, getting enraged, cut off Brahma's fifth head for having told a lie, and then dismissed them both saying that neither of them was greater than the other. But the sin of cutting off the head remained attached to Śiva. In order to get rid of it, he performed different pilgrimages, yet it did not leave him. Afterwards he went to Kapāla-Muchan, and lo! here the sin left him. Since then this pilgrimage is called Degrāmi (now shortened into Digom) or Kapāla-Muchan, the former implying "the village where afterwards Śiva had to go" and the latter "the place where the sin of cutting off the head went away." When Śiva was freed of the sin he was pleased, and he sanctified the place by saying that deceased children might attain salvation by their Śrāddha being performed here.

4. A fair is annually held here in August on the 12th of the bright fortnight of Sāwan. Thousands of people collect here that day, and those who have lost their children during the past twelve months perform their Śrāddha and give their clothes, ornaments, etc., in charity. The priests keep a number of young boys and girls here on the occasion, and people make them wear the clothes, ornaments, etc. A boy is made to wear a deceased boy's things, and a girl a deceased girl's, and then the articles are given away as offerings in the name of the deceased. It is also believed by the Hindus that if a living creature is accidentally killed by any one and he gives an image of it, made of gold or silver, in charity here, he gets rid of that sin as Śiva got of his, so at the annual fair several people may be seen giving golden and silver images of different creatures in charity.
